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ABSTRACT

Reports on monetary awards made by MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Awards to two colleges: West Hills Community College (WHCC), California; and Sinclair Community College (SCC), Ohio. The awards spotlight the singular role outstanding community colleges play in helping underserved youth and adults succeed in college and career. Both colleges received grants of $30,000 in recognition of their innovative efforts. WHCC is a small, rural college in the San Joaquin Valley. WHCC serves a 3,600 square mile agricultural area, 80% of whose population is made up of migrant farm worker families with median family incomes of $17,000. Unemployment in the region exceeds 20%, and less than 10% of adults have completed college. WHCC has boosted retention and advancement by redesigning curricula into shorter modules and integrating developmental courses into academic classes. WHCC also employs many nontraditional outreach methods in an effort to attract migrant workers. SCC is an inner-city school with 22,500 students in a region where poverty and school failure are the norm. More than 43% of the region's public school students dropped out, and 65% of students from pubic feeder schools did not meet minimum state performance standards. SCC has made outreach to these populations a priority, and has restructured its occupational programs to improve access for adults. Also reports briefly on four award finalists. (NB)

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The van would pick me up at 3:30 in the morning to take me to the fields. The smell of onions and fertilizer hit you in the face. I knew this kind of work was not my destiny... Some people tell me I take things too seriously. But I say that there's a reason I do that. I'm the first one out of my whole family to graduate from college... To be able to say "I'm in college" means self-respect, it means you're being given a chance... My big dream is to be an ambassador from Mexico.

A Future That Works

FIRST PERSON ACCOUNTS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT CHANGE LIVES

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MetLife Foundation and Jobs for the Future

Supporting Excellence in Community Colleges

2003

Introduction

Supporting Excellence in Community Colleges

The **MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Award** spotlights the singular role outstanding community colleges play in helping underserved youth and adults succeed in college and career. It shows what is possible when community colleges combine an entrepreneurial spirit with a deep commitment to academic advancement and equity.

In 2001 the MetLife Foundation panel of judges selected one large, urban college—Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio—and one small, rural college—West Hills Community College in California's San Joaquin Valley — as award winners. Both received a gift of $30,000 in recognition of their pioneering efforts. Four additional exemplary community colleges were selected as finalists: Central Piedmont Community College in North Carolina, Community College of Vermont, Portland Community College in Oregon, and San Jacinto College North outside Houston, Texas.

The work of these six community colleges is remarkable on many counts. Each, in different ways and in very different communities, has made significant institutional commitments to helping first-time college-goers, new immigrants, working adults, welfare recipients, high school dropouts, and other populations with limited school success prepare for further education or for a family-supporting career.

In making the awards, MetLife Foundation is recognizing community colleges that are creating opportunities for a bright future for individuals of all ages.

"Our primary goal is to develop a culture of college in communities where only one in ten adults has successfully completed a degree."
– Frank Gornick, West Hills Community College President

"We see our mission as helping people move from $7 per hour jobs to $17 per hour careers."
– Ned Sifferlen, Sinclair Community College President

In the lives of many students, community college offers the first real chance to choose a promising future.

Students enrolling just after high school graduation, for example, can step up from the required secondary-school curriculum to sample a broad array of general education and career preparation offerings. Some may seek a certificate or a two-year associate degree, while others aim higher, transferring credits to a four-year college or university. Either way, rock-bottom tuition and open admissions ease a path perhaps otherwise blocked by expense or exclusivity.

But for a great many others, community college does not follow immediately after high school—and for these, the decision to enroll can make an even bigger difference in their lives.

Alienated from school for whatever reasons, they may have chosen not to prolong their education. Instead, with or without a diploma in hand, they join the millions of adults who lack the qualifications to obtain satisfying work.

Some disappear into ill-paid or transitory jobs, public assistance, or other unstable circumstances. Pressed by basic needs like money, family, transportation, medical care, literacy, language, or legal residence, most face a lifetime of struggle without hope for advancement.

The light on that bleak horizon, if it appears at all, often comes from a local community college. Across the nation, 1,132 community colleges currently enroll a total of 10.4 million students. Many of these will go on to a four-year degree; in fact, nearly 50 percent of all college students begin their higher education at community colleges. Others gain from community college the skills and credentials they need to move directly into the workforce.

MEETING OBSTACLES WITH OPPORTUNITIES

Many students find their own way to a community college—whether after high school, or later, as they seek alternatives to dead-end situations. But others enter only after a direct invitation by someone who recognizes their need and potential for something more. The best community colleges reach out with energy and ingenuity to recruit and enroll people in their communities. Mustering federal, state, and local resources, they tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of their diverse students, not the other way around. For every obstacle—whether of poverty, age, language, disability, time constraints, child care, or low prior educational attainment—they offer solutions of practicality and hope.

For every obstacle—of poverty, age, language, disability, time constraints, child care, and low prior educational attainment—a community college can offer solutions of practicality and hope.

This energy and inventiveness are precisely what MetLife Foundation aimed to recognize when it launched in 2001 its Community College Excellence Awards. And the first two winners, West Hills College in California's San Joaquin Valley and Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, exemplify what the Foundation's review panel wanted most to reward: an entrepreneurial spirit undaunted by obstacles, an abiding commitment to equity, and strong results.

Serving an area that spans 3,600 square miles, two counties, and 16 small towns in Central California, West Hills College seeks out students whose families emigrated from Mexico to work in the fields and warehouses that feed a nation. West Hills recruiters show up at local schools, church groups, and even swap meets, dissolving barriers of language and culture to describe the possibilities college can offer. In the past six years, enrollment has doubled. A mix of innovative curricula, supportive services including free transportation, and community partnerships keeps students on track. West Hills is one of California's few rural community colleges to increase its transfer rate to the four-year state system in the last several years.

In Dayton, Ohio, Sinclair Community College recruits students from the area's Appalachian and African-American communities, where poverty has an iron grip. The city's public high schools suffer from a 43 percent dropout rate, and local unemployment is among the worst in the nation. Sinclair makes a priority of bringing out-of-school youth and out-of-work adults back onto an educational path toward success, often while they work at one or more outside jobs. Targeting specific postal codes to reach those most in need, it draws in a high proportion of first-generation college-goers and assists them as they tackle new challenges. Its retention rates, among the best in the nation, speak to the success of these supports. Notes *The New York Times* in a recent article: "Sometimes it seems as if every other person in Dayton is either enrolled at Sinclair, taking a class there, or planning to do so."

CHANGING INDIVIDUAL LIVES

Such summaries cannot convey, however, the profound impact these exemplary community colleges have on the lives of individual students. To put forth that evidence, this booklet presents students' personal narratives as witness.

- At 37, Stacy, a single mother of five on public assistance, is training to be a medical assistant and has found new self-respect. "One day a rope came down," she says about her Sinclair Community College opportunity. "And I just climbed up, and I'm not ever going back down."
- Michael, 19, dropped out of high school in Dayton and is working in a self-paced alternative program sponsored jointly by the school district and Sinclair Community College. "Every time I get a module down on the computer, that's a taste of graduation," he says. "I refuse to lose. I just can't fall short."
- Formerly a teenage gang member, Emily lost her best friends in the September 11 attacks and now wants to be a nurse. "I didn't want to leave my broken dreams behind," she says of her fresh start at West Hills College. "I wanted to at least try fulfilling them."
- "We didn't even have dictionaries at our house," says Juan, 19, who created a web page for the program that helped him go to West Hills College. "But we had that competitive edge. We were the farm workers and we always wanted to compete against what we called the rich kids, to get better grades and scores."

The voices of instructors and administrators also animate the pages that follow. At Sinclair and West Hills, faculty and staff meet determined students more than halfway. They bring passion and commitment to the unique educational challenge their work entails, placing their adult learners' progress ahead of traditional academic priorities of faculty research and publication. "In America, college doesn't any longer mean an intellectual elite in an ivory tower," declares Teresa Prosser, an English professor at Sinclair.

As they support students who do not fit conventional patterns of achievement, these educators push in many directions at once, transforming their own teaching strategies along with their students. "We want to change the definition of what it means to go to college," declares Sinclair Community College professor Betty Wallace. "Everyone deserves the opportunity for a better future."

TAKING NOTICE

In a higher education environment where elite private colleges appear at the top and community colleges—and their students and faculty—often occupy the bottom rung, the accomplishments of these ambitious community colleges can seem modest. Indeed, the very disadvantages that color the lives of the students chronicled here challenge community colleges nationwide: limited funds, negative stereotypes, public indifference.

But as the following stories attest, pursuing college takes brains and courage when resources are scant, conflicting pulls are intense, and failure has been a familiar companion. The determination to use every opportunity to learn and advance infuses these students' words and actions. They dream of better futures, as they try out new ideas and skills. Reaching beyond the familiar, they sometimes take others with them and grow into leaders as they do. In a culture that generally spotlights students of privilege, they deserve particular notice.

The staff and faculty that encourage these students push just as hard. Their efforts, often invisible, rarely stop at the classroom door. Their leaders fight to wrest the public dollars their colleges so desperately need, carving a local vision that unites higher education and community in ways that transform both. In a nation that speaks so loudly about educational opportunities, they merit our applause.

The day-to-day work of bringing higher education to youth and adults of all backgrounds includes three constants: outreach that brings deserving or promising students to campus, coursework and social supports that keep students enrolled, and pathways that help students advance to further education and careers. Through the narratives of students and of staff, this booklet sets forth what happens to these constants when the ingenuity of a community college meets the ambition and determination of its students.

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A growing number of people arrive at college

with a high school education, yet not prepared for "college level work." What makes it possible is the fact that they're adults—they're electing to come here, as opposed to being obligated to come, as you are in high school. Life has taught them they need more, and they approach a college education with an entirely different sense of its importance. I hear my students say over and over, "If I had only known in high school what I know now."

The typical student comes to community college because it's a way of getting to a job that's not a dead end. Between point A and point B, they start to realize the additional benefit, the broader education they get—not just answering the phone or using a computer, but things like teamwork, collaboration, coordinating, communicating, cross-cutting skills. I've had students sit in a humanities class and say, "I want to be a fireman, why do I need to know about Confucius and world history?" Eventually they come to realize that they *do* need that—that the inquiry skills they develop are absolutely applicable life skills.

Even if you never walk out with a degree, the community college develops that ability to find your place in the world and in history, to provide services to the community that relies on you, to understand the perspective of others. It may have nothing to do with pragmatic business theory, or how to hook the hose to the fire truck, but it's important to everyone. With populations who don't yet have the skills to be successful in general education courses, it behooves us to embed in our basic skills courses an appreciation of their own ability to think and to communicate. They will be more successful in life because of this. And we do that for a broad and not privileged group of people.

TERESA PROSSER
Developmental Studies Professor
Sinclair Community College

I went around the neighborhood as a student and started recruiting the ladies to come here, telling them the opportunities were going to be here for everyone. The ladies started laughing at me, a young woman saying, "You can come, too." The sad thing: they were laughing because they didn't believe in their hearts that they could come to college, that they could do something different from farm labor.

BERTHA FELIX-MATA, Dean of Student Services, West Hills College

AGGRESSIVE RECRUITMENT

The best community colleges energetically search out students in their districts who may not see higher education as an option—those who even, as Bertha Felix-Mata found, laugh at the notion. Outreach efforts, as a result, take many forms. Some community colleges, like even the most selective colleges, send recruitment letters to students who come to their attention for reasons like high scores on a particular exam. Many link with state and national initiatives that identify promising students from underserved populations. Others partner with local organizations and agencies to identify clients whose education has been cut short. A few bring the college to the student, in storefronts, neighborhood centers, and workplace classes.

Using all of these strategies and more, West Hills and Sinclair stand apart for the energy and inventiveness of their recruitment efforts. Both capitalize on a longstanding selling point of community colleges: helping people gain the skills to move from dead-end jobs to positions that offer a living wage and possibility for advancement.

In California's Central Valley, for instance, many students are children of undocumented Mexican parents, and most have worked in the fields at some point to help keep the family in food and clothing. Elizabeth, 19, describes her summer job as a farm laborer and how a West Hills education offers a way out of the onion fields:

> The van would come pick me up at 3:30 in the morning; we might have an hour and a half to drive, if we were going to a field far from my house. When you got off the truck the smell of onions and fertilizer hit you in the face. If you hadn't harvested fast enough, the onions would already be rotten; the smell would go up through your nose and make your eyes sting. We wore cotton gloves with grey tape around the tips, and our hands would move fast back and forth, picking out dirt clogs from the onions as they moved along the belt. Sometimes women would get their fingers trapped in between the rollers and their glove would get snatched off, or their fingertip cut off. If you get sleepy standing there, that can happen in an instant.
>
> The air was thick with clouds of dirt. I would wear clean clothes every morning, but after work there would be so much dirt inside your clothes it would turn to mud from the sweat on your arms and legs. After the day is over, your body temperature is so high from the heat that it's dangerous to take a shower right away. Out in the fields you would see people fainting.
>
> My parents were always telling me that they wanted me to have more than they had. I knew this kind of work was not my destiny.

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More than half way across the country, Nora, 33, was a single mother working at a sandwich chain in Dayton when she met a particularly aggressive recruiter from Sinclair. She recalls the thrill of having someone recognize her potential:

> The first night I came down to talk to the counselor for Access to Better Jobs, she looked at my resume and said, "You have all this experience and you're only making this? We can do better for you!" She brought out her schedule and had me in class that very night, two hours later. It was such an exhilarating thing; this person was willing to put herself out there to see me do better.
>
> ...I got an A in it [that first class]. It gave me the confidence to stop saying "I'm not going anywhere."
>
> When you leave here, you know things and have the confidence to present them to other people. You can take your credits to other schools and get the meat of your bachelor's degree without going through the hoops of their general education classes. And once you get the degree, it can take you somewhere. It just keeps giving back to you. You don't want for your kids to say "Why should I go to school, Mom, you didn't!"

Community colleges frequently step in with programs to help when local workers lose their jobs in a lackluster economy. A mother of four grown children, Brenda had been let go from a Central Valley medical practice. A counselor at the local Jobs Center steered her toward West Hills College—where she would receive the computer training necessary for a new career and the support to resume her schooling after 30 years. She tells her story:

> I was married when I was 15 and gave birth to my son at 16. After seven years of marriage I got a divorce and moved back home with my parents with my son and my daughter. I felt the shame of failing as they had said I would, and of being on public assistance.
>
> I remember walking into the welfare department into what looked like a sea of people—mothers with crying babies, small children running everywhere and their mothers yelling at them to sit down, old men sitting on benches reading the paper. I felt frozen in my tracks. I didn't know what to ask the lady at the counter. But I needed money to feed my children, so I stepped up and said, "Where do I go next?"
>
> I went back to high school and got my G.E.D. while my mother watched the children. I worked for 13 years for a medical practice, until the company downsized and I didn't have the computer skills to keep my job. I was scared, angry, and shocked.

AT A GLANCE

Sinclair Community College

Sinclair Community College, located in inner city Dayton, enrolls 22,500 students in a region where poverty and school failure are the norm. Dayton has double the state average of low-income households. Forty-three percent of its public school students drop out. Of Sinclair's top 20 feeder high schools in 1999, 65 percent did not meet minimum state performance standards. In surrounding Montgomery County, 22 percent of 15- to 19-year olds are not in school.

Sinclair's mission and programs tackle these challenges head on. It has made outreach to underserved populations a priority. The college has restructured occupational programs so working adults can enroll and advance more easily. It plays a leadership role in community-wide efforts to serve out-of-school youth, welfare recipients, and low-wage workers.

This creativity and drive have paid off. Sinclair attracts more low-income, first-generation college-goers than the national average (68 percent versus 50 percent). Outreach targeted to Appalachian and African-American neighborhoods has increased enrollments of both groups in degree and certificate programs. More than three-quarters of the students in Sinclair's Student Support Services program re-enroll the following quarter (compared to approximately 55 percent nationally in support programs at other colleges).

Responding to the needs of working adults, Sinclair prizes accelerated education. Developmental education—the college's largest department, serving 42 percent of all students—now includes 31 different competency-based, short-term certificate programs that respond to the time constraints of adults balancing work, family, and education. The college is working hard to strengthen the links between credit- and non-credit programs, between short-term certificates and degree programs, and between associates programs and transfer to BA courses of study. Access to Better Jobs, a program for unemployed and working adults with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty guideline, features short-term workforce training programs that enable participants to get a job quickly. Once employed, program participants receive assistance with enrolling in degree programs, securing financial aid, and obtaining support that helps them stay employed.

Sinclair also embraces community partnerships that benefit its students and the region alike. For more than 20 years, the college has played a key role in local education and economic development efforts with large yields: a new countywide alternative education initiative for out-of-school youth, a unique Job Center, TechPrep programs, a local workforce board and adult education and training council.

The college promotes innovation and creativity among its faculty, too, aware that they form the front line in meeting the complex academic needs of Sinclair's diverse student body. Annual awards programs and small grants for curricular innovations, combined with professional development opportunities, signal the leadership's commitment to high-quality and inventive teaching.

The New York Times captured Sinclair's dynamism well: "Sometimes it seems as if every other person in Dayton is either enrolled at Sinclair, taking a class there, or planning to do so."

> Now, 30 years later, after remarrying and having twin daughters, I am back at school again. I'm studying computer information systems, and I work for One Step Beyond, a program that helps disadvantaged students adjust to college life and work. After I graduate I hope to stay on at West Hills as a student adviser. I've learned skills I can incorporate into a new kind of workplace: desktop publishing, spreadsheets, all the things that will lead me into my next job.

Aware that they cannot simply wait for applicants to come to them, exemplary community colleges send recruiters anywhere that local people gather—school meetings, church basements, community centers, fairs, shopping centers. Sinclair, for example, partners with a community center in East Dayton, where many of the city's Appalachian residents struggle with poverty, poor health, and illiteracy. Holding classes at a familiar neighborhood site can make a big difference in this culturally separate community where people rarely venture near the downtown campus, comments Sinclair professor Betty Wallace:

> For a lot of our students, to be able to say "I'm in college" means self-respect; you're going to be given a chance. We go into the high schools and offer study skills, and we go to the Volunteers of America [community] center, where they feel at ease, and teach math, reading, and science. For very low-skill students, we link everything to job skills or life skills. When they get their math, they're learning how to read labels, translate a recipe and cut it down, or how to read prescription labels line by line. We hope they will eventually come on campus; our program called Reach Across Dayton emphasizes cross-cultural connections, and we stress Appalachian roots of our faculty.

The dean of student services at West Hills College, Bertha Felix-Mata grew up as the oldest of nine children in a single-parent, Spanish-speaking home in Mendota, California. A West Hills graduate herself, she has dedicated herself since the age of 19 to attracting the people of her agricultural community to the college:

> You can't just sit here; you really have to devise ways of making people welcome, speak to them in their own language. I know the community leaders, and I go to places where they meet. I say, "I'm here to work for you. If I don't have what you need, tell me what you need." We need to recruit not just students but families, to educate parents. So we go to the monthly meetings of the migrant community, which are part of the school migrant education program. In summer we have a welcome night, because parents need to be familiar with the campus, and we tell parents they can come here anytime they want. I go to Saturday fairs, swap meets, flea markets, Sunday church meetings. I organize evening meetings when parents can go, things that work for them.

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AT A GLANCE

West Hills Community College

West Hills Community College serves a 3,600-square-mile agricultural district in California's San Joaquin Valley. First-generation Americans, many migrant farm worker families, make up 80 percent of the local population. Median personal income stands at $17,000, unemployment exceeds 20 percent, and less than 10 percent of the region's adults have completed college.

Nine years ago, West Hills Community College was on the verge of closing. Its facilities had not been repaired after a devastating 1983 earthquake. Enrollment was declining, and the college couldn't meet a course schedule with consistency. Under the leadership of Frank Gornick, a West Hills graduate hired as president in 1994, the college has made a remarkable turnaround. It has become a regional leader in expanding access to post-secondary education, creating job opportunities, and building community collaborations that serve the needs of its largely migrant population. The community demonstrated its renewed confidence in 1998 when 68 percent of those voting passed a $19 million bond measure to rebuild West Hills. Coupled with $36 million in state aid for deferred maintenance, the bond issue has enabled the college to build a new, state-of-the-art campus.

West Hills defines its educational mission as creating and sustaining a culture of learning in a community with almost no tradition of post-secondary education. Aggressive outreach to local K-12 systems and out-of-school youth programs, using bilingual staff, has helped double enrollment in six years, a growth rate three times the state average. West Hills is one of California's few rural community colleges to increase its transfer rate to the four-year state system.

Knowing that many of its students require innovative strategies to succeed, West Hills allocates 30 percent of its annual budget to new programs. By redesigning curricula into shorter modules and integrating developmental math and reading courses into academic classes, West Hills boosts retention and advancement. A partnership with a nearby four-year college allows students to complete four-year degrees on the West Hills campus in Lemoore. West Hills has also established a teacher-preparation program through dual enrollment with a four-year college, an Allied Health Initiative to prepare health professionals for rural health jobs, and a high tech "Farm of the Future" that brings Global Positioning technology to students and local farmers.

West Hills responds equally to the particular needs of its community. With 90 percent of the population lacking transportation, it offers van service to the college. With 50 percent of its students Spanish speaking, it has invested heavily in ESL programs, including providing interpreters in occupational classes. Because the local employer base is limited, the college targets its occupational courses at community needs, such as childcare certification, heavy equipment operation, and truck and bus driver training. Its new allied health programs have attracted a state mental health facility.

The college is also pioneering distance learning combined with on-campus supports, making it easier for working adults who live far from campus to enroll and advance.

West Hills demonstrates that creative leadership, focused innovation, and responsiveness can transform a community college into a rich and vital community resource.

> When people come here, it's the result of many nontraditional outreach efforts by the college. We just had our fourth annual women's conference to provide information for students about child care, domestic violence, time management—all the issues that might keep women from coming to school or might make them drop out. They are dealing with very strong issues, rooted in their families. If they are in their early 20s, living at home with parents who won't let them go to school, or if they don't have transportation, they may just stay home.

Susie Briones directs the College Assistance Migrant Program, a federal program for students from migrant families, which helps West Hills students with expenses such as tuition, books, and transportation. She agrees that the program must involve the family.

> The special needs of migrant students are also cultural needs, because the culture is so tight. For example, they often don't want to leave their families, because they bring money in to help the parents. We need to educate the parents to let their children go for a few years, in order to get them back. We hold immigration seminars every three months, and we tell them and their parents, "The fields are not always going to be there to work in; these days they are building machines that can till and pick." Getting educated is going to be the key. Who better to be a health worker than a migrant who knows the medical problems and remedies of the local farm workers? Whatever barrier they have, we try to break it down.

REACHING INTO THE SCHOOLS

Aggressive recruitment, aimed at potential students and sometimes their families, is one of several effective outreach strategies. Conscientious community colleges work equally hard to establish and maintain close connections with young people of high school age. Summer programs that help bridge the postsecondary divide by giving students a taste of college offerings have a long record of success, with the national program Upward Bound, started in the 1960s, a longstanding example. Dual enrollment programs that let high school students accumulate early college credits can build strong connections, too. The resulting "domino effect" not only sets students on their way, but also helps them to move more efficiently toward a college degree.

Conscientious community colleges create a web of relationships with alternative high school programs, counselors, and youth workers.

Through its Year Round Youth program, for instance, West Hills College works overtime to raise awareness among high school students of how education can improve their chances in life. Its six-week Upward Bound summer program brings 100 young people ages 14 to 18 to the campus. During the year the college conducts tutoring groups at the high schools, Saturday workshops on campus, and cultural field trips. Dean Bertha Felix-Mata describes the effects on the young participants and their communities:

> As part of the Year Round Youth program, the past four years the kids have done research projects about issues in their communities and made presentations to propose solutions. Now the youth are being trained from ninth grade on to look at their communities, identify problems that have been there for years and years, and ask how they can help address these problems. They become involved, they own it. They are our future mayors, lawyers, doctors, deans. It's hard to get professional people to come work out here; we need to grow our own. It's very powerful; they are the ones that are going to make it happen.

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Just as often, though, community colleges committed to aggressive outreach must offer some high school students a lifeline rather than a leg up, if they are to make their way to postsecondary education.

Nineteen-year-old Irene, for instance, had a difficult time in high school, where a troubled family situation led her to run wild with her three older brothers. Now part of the College Assistance Migrant Program program at West Hills, she credits another West Hills program that reached into her high school for helping her graduate:

> I always figured that I would probably end up just like my brothers. My oldest brother joined a gang in high school and dropped out as a sophomore. That was his way out. Toward the end of my freshman year, my brothers introduced me to drugs, and I almost didn't stay in school. I was behind 40 credits, and I didn't think I had a chance to graduate.
>
> But one teacher knew the things that had gone on with me, and he helped me through it. I realized then that I didn't want to be doing the things I had been doing. My senior year I ended up in a special program to help migrant students make up the credits they were behind. Whatever classes you have failed, they help you catch up. I used to stay up till one or two in the morning, reading books and doing the work. The day before my high school graduation I had to take 11 tests in two hours, to get the credits to be able to walk with my class at graduation.

Community colleges like West Hills and Sinclair also link with alternative high schools and similar programs, creating a web of relationships and extensive referrals among counselors, teachers, administrators, and youth workers.

Nineteen-year old Michael, for all purposes a high school dropout, is the beneficiary of one such alternative program. After he lost his mother to cancer, Michael found himself in trouble for fighting at one school after another. But when he landed at Dayton's Job Center, a counselor suggested a flexible career technology program linked with Sinclair Community College, in which he could earn his high school diploma and go on from there. Now Michael balances four hours of daily classes with six hours of work in a fast-food restaurant, and he hopes to become a plumber. The program, he explains, has helped him find his bearings in his last year as a teenager:

> After I got in trouble for fighting in high school, my counselor didn't just get a police report on me and kick me out right there. She went over the problems in a down-to-earth way and introduced me to the alternative program. That was a blessing right then. Now I'm trying not to get in fights like I used to. I'm trying to be humble. For a long time I felt like an outsider, and now finally I'm sitting down having conversations with my grandmother, my older cousins, my family. I'm finally starting to believe that things happen for a reason. I couldn't accept that after I just lost my mom. I gotta do something. That's the way I think about it. I just want to do something positive with my life.
>
> Getting closer to graduation—I never thought I'd be doing it, with as many high schools as I've been to. Every time I get a module down on the computer, that's a taste of graduation. I wouldn't have words to explain how I would feel graduating, after all these years of getting up and going to school. I refuse to lose. I just can't fall short.

Sinclair also works with surrounding school districts to offer viable alternatives for older and out-of-school youth. Andre, 19, is finishing up a computer-assisted tech-prep program in Dayton with ties to the college.

> I think I'm learning more now than I did in regular high school. Every day I learn something new. I was reading about mummification back in Egypt. I got into that a little bit, and cowboy poetry. That was all right. When I took government in high school—twice—I didn't really learn. We just answered questions in the

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book. I would read the question, try to find it in the book, write it down. Here I'm reading information and they ask you questions while you're reading it.

But for all the outreach and programs and networking, sometimes the barriers to a college education are nearly unimaginable. Emily, for instance, ran away from home at 13 to join an Omaha street gang. After a year of violence and sleeping behind dumpsters, a high school boyfriend helped her return home to her mother. Now 22, Emily is in her fifth semester at West Hills, working toward a nursing degree. Her story underscores the payoffs that occur when institutional outreach meets individual determination:

Just after my fourteenth birthday they beat me in to the gang, to make me a member. I was just expecting a few slaps, but today I still have scars from it. They beat me for three hours in a back alley near the high school, with bats and chains and those knuckle things. I was in the hospital for two weeks. Even though I felt stupid, I couldn't go home after that; I couldn't escape them. Either you run with them, or you can die trying to get out.

But for all the outreach and programs and networking, sometimes the barriers to a college education are nearly unimaginable.

I had one close friend in the gang, and I ended up dating her brother; he was older than me, one of the smart nerdy kids in the school. He wasn't in the gang, and he figured it out when he found her gun under her bed. He got us out of there; he went in there and physically fought the gang leader for us. He helped me go to my mother and tell her everything.

Between my mom and the other people that supported me, I actually got my act together. I turned the anger inside me into a kind of competitive aggression that I used to get me through the rest of my life. I knew I was changing; I never really had a childhood because of the gang.

In twelfth grade I went back to a G.E.D. program and finished it in three months. My scores were so high that they gave me a high school diploma. I got something in the mail from West Hills College, because they were looking for Hispanic students who were interested in math and science careers. My mother's family was still living here, and I decided to reconnect with them and to find out who I am.

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We have students right out of high school, people that are grandparents, people in their 20s and their 40s, people who have worked in their fields for 20 years. In the evening you find the more mature students, the working single parents. It's a joy to work with students and help them find an avenue to persist in college and succeed.

Helen McCann, Professor of Child and Family Education, Sinclair Community College

BUILDING RESPONSIVE COURSEWORK

No college can boast more variety in its student body than a vibrant community college, which welcomes through open enrollment students of every age, background, and circumstance. Betty Wallace, Sinclair's chair of Developmental Studies, says she considers this one of the institution's greatest assets for students:

It is possible for someone to come to Sinclair who cannot read at all; they take our courses in developmental studies, and right next door there might be honors students.

Still, addressing the academic needs of students who arrive on campus without the skills to succeed in credit-level programs poses daunting challenges. Even the best tech-prep and alternative programs that help older teens like Andre and Michael cannot fill in years of lackluster learning. That many of these students, once in college, also struggle to balance the demands of work and family simply ups the ante. Helping such students find their legs quickly, both Sinclair and West Hills believe, can make all the difference in these students' hitting their stride and persisting.

The Developmental Studies Department at Sinclair starts by bolstering basic skills and filling in critical content knowledge. It conducts 258 sections of

courses taught by 28 full-time and 49 part-time faculty members. Fully 80 percent of Sinclair students, and 50 percent of those who graduate, have taken at least one course there, to develop study skills, reading, math, science, English grammar and composition, or English for speakers of other languages. Innovative colleges link developmental education with credit courses so students move faster to areas of interest. Such instruction forms "the backbone of the college," says Wallace.

> A person may come back after 30 years to become a nurse, for example, but may never have taken a science course after high school. To take the regular science courses here, they need our support to read and make sense of the materials. We partner with the Chemistry Department to offer supplemental instruction in which students can watch the class on videotape, stopping to ask us questions whenever they need more explanation. It's the very same material, but we slow it down. It's quite beneficial; people are clamoring for more, and the Biology Department would like to have us do it for them, too.

Stacy had always loved writing in high school, but when she returned to Sinclair as a mother of five in her mid-30s, her communication skills had grown rusty. Enrolled in an intensive communications class, she is polishing those skills:

> They put a lot of emphasis on reading, writing, and presentation; now I know how to use proper terminology to get the point across. They are teaching us to take information and present it to other people, to have experience in a leadership role. The second-year students are asked to speak in front of the new students in our class.

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Sinclair's Department of Student Services backs up the college's developmental courses with counselors, online placement testing, and 119 tutors to help students individually; in math and writing labs, students can also get extra coaching. Plans are underway for a new Developmental Learning Center that would house all these activities, integrating student services even further with developmental studies and other courses.

At West Hills and Sinclair, a commitment to flexible and inventive coursework expands these bridges to college-level education. Research shows, for example, that many working students successfully combine face-to-face classes with online offerings, especially when limited online enrollment and regular feedback insure that high tech learning does not become too remote.

No college can boast more variety in its student body than a vibrant community college.

Kathy, 42 years old and another Dayton mother of five, describes the benefits of Sinclair's high tech learning program. Taking some of her courses online and communicating electronically with her professors has meant that Kathy can grab spare moments for study as they appear:

> I work hard, trying to study and run a household with five kids. My English classes are online, so I can do them from home. You read the parts of the book she's assigned, and you write papers and email back and forth.
>
> I started in Computer Information Systems, and then switched to Business Information Systems. Now, after two years and 58 credits, I think I've finally decided what I want to be when I grow up—I want to work in graphic design, to be creative. I'm in my first quarter of the Visual Information Systems program. I found a boring handout at the Student Support Services office and pitched them this idea of letting me remake the pamphlet as a design project, a portfolio piece for me. And they're going to go with it—in my first quarter of design I have a success!

And for students like 19-year-old Michael, computer-aided instruction has become more than his ticket to a high school diploma; it has become a staple he will search out at Sinclair, too.

> On an average day I go to school for four hours, but I can stay longer if I want. Instead of having regular academic classes, we have all our work built into the computer. We get to choose what to work on; it's all on you what you want to do. I just work on one class at a time till it's done—right now I'm doing a senior English class. You can get a year's work done in two or three months.
>
> You sign on to your computer and your stuff comes up, like a teacher, and they have assistants walking around the room who can help you. It teaches you how to write a

report, things like that. It checks your understanding, asks you questions, and after the tutorial you go to an application worksheet where they give you ten questions to make sure you get it, and if you pass that you go to the mastery test. If you don't pass, they give you individual help. You can work as fast or slow as you want to.

The work is easy if you just sit down and concentrate. It takes me about a month to get a class done if I go to school every day. I could be finished by the middle of the year. I have to take senior English, government, and semester two of American History. If you miss too many days, you can get kicked out. But I'd rather just get in and get out. I mind my own business, do my work.

Another mainstay at the best community colleges is coursework that includes meaningful connections with the real world and real work. Again, as research shows, such "engaged" learning can ignite student motivation to persist and take the next academic step. Indeed flexible programming, like online learning or modular courses, and engaging instruction go a long way towards avoiding the revolving door pattern that afflicts many community colleges, where students repeatedly enter and exit, making little progress.

For Jessie, the youngest in a family of five children whose parents both work on a Central Valley ranch, the opportunity to explore various career options while at West Hills has helped to shape her future.

Before college I didn't have an idea of what's actually out there. When I came to West Hills I started working for Americorps, as a reading and writing tutor for elementary school students whose scores were low. As part of that I took an Introduction to Teaching course, and at the end I'll get money for further education. Some of it I really liked—mostly working with the sixth graders—so I started thinking about doing educational counseling. I'm in the liberal arts area here, so I took a psychology course. Sometimes I think about writing children's books; I have a collection of children's books that I love.

After praising the classroom instruction she was receiving in communication skills in Sinclair's developmental studies program, Stacy goes on to say:

And not only do we do academic and written work, but we have hands-on experiences in our field. We do an internship at the Air Force base and at the elementary schools, partly in clinical skills and partly in medical administration.

Sinclair staff member Polly Girvin runs a program funded by the federal Workforce Investment Act to help retrain older workers. She describes how the college's flexible approach helps students over age 45 cope with the challenges of finding new work:

I love getting folks to recognize the skills and values they have, not just the resumes on the paper. We do a lot of storytelling, getting beyond biography to tell about things they did that were deeply satisfying. They have so much to look back on and harvest—a great deal of competence, acquired over a long period of time—and they don't know what they did that makes them good at what they did. They don't remember how they've learned it. They leave here with a pocketful of examples of what has made them valuable to an employer. Many people have to shift their technical skills, but that they take with them—what makes them good at what they do. It's exciting to see them recognize it!

Then we get them into the right courses that will be most useful in getting back into the job market. A lot never saw themselves as college students, so there's a mystique about the college. They translate their experience into starting at the highest level they can, to get as much as possible from the three quarters in which our program funds their books, tuition, travel stipend. Those who have some college can complete a certificate in the short term. Others get hooked on college and go on. I get emails back from a guy who got his teaching certificate at Wright State and has a job teaching, happy as a lark. Someone who was in sales, someone from a tech job, someone from public relations—they all started substitute teaching to pay the bills and are now going into teaching.

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Responsive coursework that is challenging yet enabling can make all the difference in whether a student stays and progresses at a community college. However, creating an environment of support and belonging is just as important. The best community colleges live up to the name, insuring that small classes and involved teachers nurture students' individual progress, and a robust counseling system eases the psychological issues that accompany new learning challenges. They support students in concrete ways, too, connecting them with local, state, and federal programs that can help with child care, health care, housing, and transportation. Financial assistance is often the starting place.

Juan, at 20, excelled in math during his first semester at West Hills, but with money at home scarce, the cost of books and tuition forced him to withdraw. Recognizing his talents, the College Assistance Migrant Program program smoothed his return. He says:

> At college, when people see the real you, they understand what you're really doing and how hard you're working. I always wanted to keep on going. There are all kinds of barriers, but it's always financial. Now the College Assistance Migrant Program program pays for my books and tuition, and after I created a web page for the program, they gave me a stipend, too.

With her many family responsibilities, Kathy also found returning to Sinclair Community College too much to handle at first. She tells how the college support system stepped in to help when she summoned the will to try again:

> I took a couple of classes at Sinclair some time ago, but I stopped going, and then two years ago I started again, with the help of the student support services. They have grant money available if you carry six credits for three quarters and maintain your grades. I still had an F on my record from a class I had dropped out of years before, but they gave me a fresh start.

Sometimes, though, the largest obstacles are the everyday ones familiar to so many: a baby-sitting problem or a lack of transportation. The best community colleges

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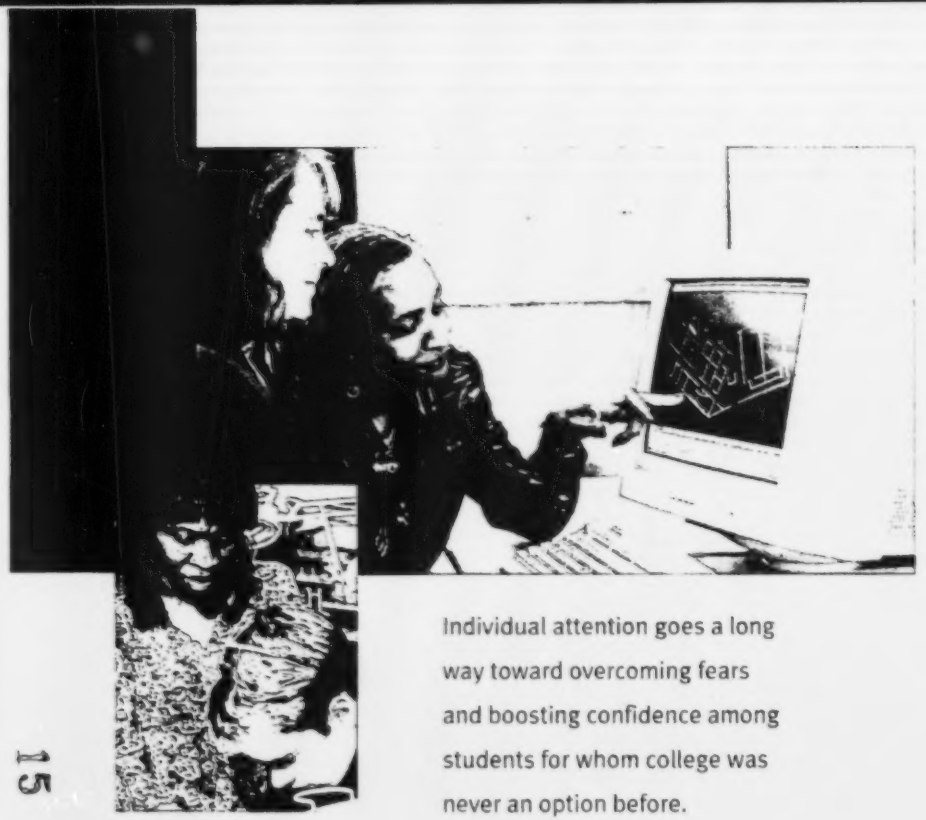
recognize these as important barriers, and act to breach them. Bertha Felix-Mata, dean of student services at West Hills, has worked hard on these issues. She describes the services she hopes will boost the numbers of Hispanic women on West Hills campuses:

> Some of the programs offer child care at county centers, and each campus also offers child care or a subsidy for child care. We have transportation vans that go into rural communities and pick up students at key times and spots. Many students start at 7:30 a.m. and also have work-study jobs, so they have a whole day here, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. They travel huge distances to come here: to Mendota it takes an hour, to Firebaugh another 15 minutes, and Tranquillity is 45 minutes away. We are working with those communities to establish local child care centers, and we also sometimes offer classes in their local schools.
>
> We have a very strong network. We work so closely with the students that if we haven't seen them for a few days, we start asking and we bring them in. If there is something going on in the household, we are able to identify it.

This sort of individual attention goes a long way to overcoming fears and boosting confidence among students for whom college was never an option before. And as



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Individual attention goes a long way toward overcoming fears and boosting confidence among students for whom college was never an option before.

students begin to see tangible success, they grow deeply attached to their schools and to the faculty and staff members who mentor and assist them.

An abuse survivor, Stacy was struggling to raise her children on public assistance when she decided to train as a medical assistant at Sinclair. The attitudes and support of her teachers and counselors, she says, kept her going:

> When I first came here I was so overwhelmed, breaking away from domestic violence to believe that I could be a productive part of society. This school has been instrumental in helping so many women like me. The faculty and professors are always there to help you. They don't single you out as a woman who's been on assistance. My counselor made sure I understood what would happen in the program—computer knowledge, soft office skills, job skills, and life skills. They helped me arrange my resume, giving me confidence to make it. I went through Fresh Start, which allows you to recalculate your GPA if you didn't do well before. I work part time at the Admissions Department, where my supervisor is very supportive.

> People see me totally differently now. I was at this level: no education aside from the high school diploma, no skills, welfare recipient, and no self-esteem. Now I'm respected by a lot of people here. I'm working; I have a good rapport with my professors. I'm about to graduate in the spring, and that's a major step for me coming from where I came from.

Sue, 35, had married as a teenager and had two boys, now 14 and 18. After her divorce, when the youngest was in preschool, she went back to get her high school equivalency credential, and then signed up at Sinclair in a program for former welfare recipients. She, too, tells how the support of her instructor made all the difference:

> I would never have imagined I would take computer classes, but these days everything is going to computers. When I first came to Sinclair I was nervous about it. But my first instructor here acted like she really cared and wanted to see me succeed. She gave me courage to go on and overcome the computer fear people get. I realized I can do this, and I went on and took other classes of hers. She stuck by me for five years straight before I graduated; she's seen me grow a lot.
>
> Once I started working in the Math Department, I gained confidence and got recognition for what I could do. I had a mentor there who took me under her wing. I could talk to her about my family concerns, my college studies, and my work with her. And I got a chance to use my skills in a job, before I had to go out to the world and get a regular job.

Like Sue, many students at Sinclair and West Hills hold part-time jobs at the college itself. The work-study arrangement helps with their expenses as it fosters job skills. Research shows that on-campus employment boosts student retention, and the college also benefits by training its next generation of staff. Nora, the single mother who left her dead-end job to take business classes at Sinclair, describes yet another advantage:

> I work full time at Sinclair as a secretary in the Civil Architectural and Industrial Design Department, and I take courses part time at night toward my associate's degree in Business Information Systems. In my job, I model myself after my mentor here at Sinclair; if you're willing to put forth the effort, I go out on a limb. If I can't help you, I will find someone who will. My goal is to become a part-time instructor in the BIS Department at Sinclair.

In addition to employment, community colleges offer opportunities for student leadership that builds a new sense of dignity and agency and fosters new ambitions. At West Hills, student representation on planning committees and boards ensures that students have a hand—and a voice—in shaping their education.

Elizabeth, 19, gradually began involving herself in student activities and fundraising events on the West Hills Coalinga campus. As she grew more confident, she ran for office in various campus organizations. She says:

West Hills gave me the chance to become a leader. I was a shy person before; I kept to myself a lot and never felt comfortable getting up and speaking in front of people. Now I've sat in on board of directors meetings, served on the college council, been secretary of One Step Beyond and moved on to be its vice president. I'm also the president of the Associated Student Bodies for this campus.

For students like these, community college can provide not only a stimulating and satisfying environment but also a home away from home. Yaro, 22, took over as the woman of her household when her mother left without warning five years ago. Now she rides the bus for hours every day to attend West Hills College, where she has become immersed in the close community she craves. She explains:

Once I came here I wasn't lost; they gave me the attention that I need. They grew on me, like I grew on them. Even though I live at home, I'm here 24-7. Everyone here is like a family to me—my friends in clubs, the people I work for. I would do anything for them; I volunteer for anything the school needs. When I went away this summer to work and then came back, everyone was happy to see me. School is like my second home. It's how I get by.

Some people tell me I take things too seriously. But I say that there's a reason I do that. School is serious for me. It's really important; it comes first. I'm the first one out of all the whole family on both sides to graduate from college; two of my older sisters never went to college, and the oldest never graduated from high school. My brother sells pagers to get by. I got him into West Hills this year; I made him come.

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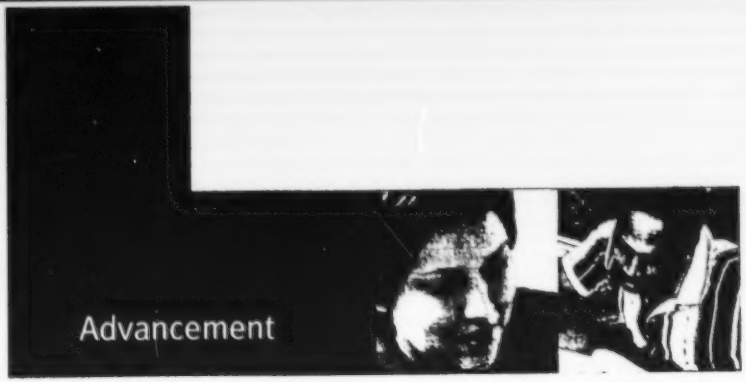

Advancement

We want to change the meaning of what it means to go to college—everyone deserves the opportunity for a better future. When I started 25 years ago here, we used to receive mostly adult learners: a displaced factory worker, a divorced homemaker, or a mom going back to work after having kids. The average age used to be 32 or 34. Now the average is down to 22 or 24. We get high school students for whom high school may be too mickey-mouse, or recent graduates who need a financial boost to help pay for four years of college. And we get students in their early 20s: military people, or single moms trying to make it on their own, coming back to get a better life for their kids, to get off welfare or out of their parents' home.

Betty Wallace, Developmental Studies Professor, Sinclair Community College

For many West Hills and Sinclair students, what began as a push to leave public assistance behind or to "better oneself" has assumed much more substance. Step-by-step these students have used the flexible, inventive coursework and comprehensive support offered them to fashion futures—as different as their starting points—which they had never imagined. As Jessie says:

For as long as I can remember my family has lived in a small rented house on a ranch where my father irrigated the fields and my mother sorted almonds in the warehouse. Before [West Hills] I didn't have an idea of what's actually out there.

And when Stacy the single mom speaks of the journey from welfare to a new career, she now talks of going further still:

With a year of prep courses at Sinclair, I switched my major to medical assistant. I wanted to contribute in some way, with the world the way it is now; there's a lot of hurt people out there, not only physically but mentally. I could shed some light, especially in a domestic violence situation. When I graduate as a medical assistant I want

As students encounter instructors whose interest and support change their future prospects, many shape their own aspirations to match.

to work in a physician's office, and if I like it, I may go back to become an instructor, or take more courses to become a nurse. This school is amazing; there is no limitation on what you can do. A lot of times with only a few more classes, you can do something else new.

Just a few years ago I would never have dreamed of standing in front of people and speaking about my personal experiences, and now I am able to do that with confidence and pride, to help other people with my story. I could have taken all my circumstances and done negative things with them—murdered my abusers or been bad to my children, took matters into my hands. But instead I took matters into my own hands in a positive way, and overcame my obstacles, and I'm here to share my story—because I have an outlet.

I've been asked by a lot of places to come and speak to the youth. I see other young ladies that come in, and I think I can help them. Sometimes you can get so low that the only place you can go is just to stand up. I fell in a ditch and once I hit bottom I couldn't figure out how to get up to see the light. And then one day a rope came down and I just climbed up, and I'm not ever going back down.

Anita had always dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but to support her two babies she took a city job instead. When she was laid off, she decided to return to school, where her dreams have come to life again, reinforced by a Sinclair professor's special interest and encouragement:

When my little one came and said, "Mommy, I'm hungry," I withdrew all my retirement money to come to Sinclair. Because of my age and the adversity of my situation, law school was going to be a dream, nothing that I would consider pursuing. I decided to be a legal assistant instead; if I couldn't be the tree, I would be the best branch I could.

This year I take 19 credit hours and sleep about 75 minutes a night. I work three jobs; one as a secretary in the Emergency Medical Services Department, one as a weekend registrar at Children's Medical Center, and evenings as a legal runner at a law firm. To keep my kids in school at the same place, I pay more for the little one's preschool than I do for my mortgage. I make $900 a month and have $2,200 of bills. You see the white utilities notice saying they'll shut you off, then you juggle it. You say, I'll listen to you this month.

The light shone on me last year in my litigation class, when we were working on a case to be held in a courtroom setting. I was the counsel for the plaintiff, and all week I prepared my questions for the witness, my closing arguments. After I finished and sat down, it was very quiet, and then someone said, "Wow." After class my professor walked up to me and said, "Can I have a word with you, counselor?" I thought she was being funny. But she looked at me and said, "What are you doing when you leave here? I really hope you think about law school. I know what's going on with you, but you can do it, and I'll do everything I can to help."

That was the day I started to think of legal assisting not as an ending but as a stepping-stone to my final goal. In January I will start taking courses for my B.A. in criminal

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justice, and when I graduate from Sinclair in June, I can transfer them to Urbana University and graduate a year later. After that I plan to go to the University of Kentucky Law School. I went down there a couple of weeks ago, and they said, "You worry about getting in, we'll worry about paying."

Bertha Felix-Mata, the dean of student services at West Hills College, points out a common thread in these students' stories. She emphasizes the importance of creating a pattern in which more education results in continual advancement for families without privilege:

> The idea of all these programs is to prepare students to go on to universities. They have to be competitive; you're not going to be competitive with a 2.5, if you're thinking about getting a master's degree. Retention and transfer here is good; West Hills was cited for its 28 percent transfer rate to other California state universities.
>
> Remember, the majority of our families here are from Hispanic descent. If you look at that culture, one of its strengths is family, and we have tapped into that essence. When we reach into a family and four or five of its members become educated, they start to follow a pattern, and we also strengthen our communities. Now they have income and opportunities, and they come back—that's what happened to me. So education itself becomes an economic stimulator.

Oscar offers a case in point. At 27, he could have continued in his low-wage job, but he wanted to provide more for his two young sons. He began to work for an uncle who owned a nightclub across the border from San Diego, and then a car accident upturned his life. A semester at West Hills and a taste of success in the classroom and on campus have Oscar imagining doing much more than serving fast food or drinks. He tells the story:

> Waking up in the hospital, with I.V.s in me and a neck brace on, scared the hell out of me. The first thought that came to me was about my children. How could I not tell them how much I loved them? I thought of all the things I would be missing in their lives if I died. Two days later I got a ticket and came home.

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> For a month I could not do anything; I would just sit at home and watch TV. Everyone would tell me that I should do something with myself, but I was depressed and I didn't see a future. But when my boys came to see me, I remembered again what it was that had always inspired me to work, no matter how difficult my life was.
>
> One day I came to West Hills College to see what it had to offer me. I already knew a lot about business, so I made up my mind to go into that field and maybe someday start my own restaurant and club. It is now my first semester here, and I am the vice president of One Step Beyond and involved with several other groups. I have my boys with me every other weekend, and they are doing well, too. I talk to them about my school, and they talk to me about theirs. My life has changed for the better, and I see life in a whole different way. You need to appreciate that what you have is precious—now, not when it's gone!

Lilia, too, is renewing her plans for the future and giving them flight. She moved back and forth across the border several times as a child, finished college in Mexico and then realized she needed English fluency to achieve her goals. Now 24, she is starting over at West Hills, with a full schedule and a steadfast determination:

> The women in my family are very smart and ambitious. The men tend to get in trouble, like my older brother got married too young and quit school. Before, my father's family had money, but he had problems with drinking and so he came here.
>
> I have been in the U.S. from Mexico ten months now. Before I came here I didn't speak any English. I started at West Hills a couple of months ago, living on campus at Coalinga. Here I am studying English, accounting, math, health, and business computers. I want to be certified to teach Spanish or math, and then go to UCLA and get a master's degree in political science or communications. I like to get involved with people and politics; I belong to a club here about politics and government. And then after a few years I might go back and work in Mexico. My big dream is to be an ambassador from Mexico.

And as students encounter instructors whose interest and support change their future prospects, many shape their own aspirations to match. Juan's aptitude for mathematics and computers impressed his college mentors, and West Hills trained him to tutor other students from a migrant background. Now he too wants to become an educator, he says:

> I've always wanted to teach. I was picked up as a tutor for the College Assistance Migrant Program program, and after just helping students to do their homework, I found this thing for teaching. That tutoring job helped me, because if I hadn't been doing it, I would have been working delivering pizza or on the farm—not at something that helped me realize what I would do later. My goal is to transfer to a four-year university, and then I want to come back and teach.

Elizabeth at 19 is already thinking of becoming a teacher in the Central Valley:

> I know that people who work in the field don't have a lot of high hopes for their children. Living in the community where I grew up, there's a lot of poverty and lack of resources for these children. Without the right support and special resources from a teacher or someone in their lives, a lot of these kids give up on themselves. I would like to help them the way my teachers helped me. If it wasn't for their support, I would probably have given up myself, and I would probably still be in the onion fields.

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Last Words

What are the voices of Stacy and Anita, Oscar and Juan saying to the leaders of community colleges around the nation? If one takes these individuals' experiences seriously, in what ways would the direction of such colleges move in the century ahead?

Listening carefully to students like these, whose lives are changing daily as a result of their studies, provides answers not just supported by research but also grounded in reality. It shows that aggressive recruitment does matter, because so many would otherwise not approach the resources their community college offers. It reminds us how many students must struggle simply for the time and funds to undertake college courses, and how much support they need as they summon the courage to take on new academic challenges at the same time.

And it shows that the effort pays off. All across the country, local community colleges are developing into vibrant centers of intellectual and professional growth. By instilling new hope and building new capacity in ordinary people, they create more than individual stories of accomplishment, however extraordinary they may be. True to their name, they empower the communities they serve, bolstering their outlook for the future.

A divorced single mother of 33, Ronnette now works toward a degree in business at Sinclair. Her dreams of serving her community articulate well the promise of community colleges everywhere:

> I want to work in school district administration somehow or in some civic capacity for the city or county. I'm really into children, what we're going to do with our future. That's another way that Sinclair is a community college—they help you graduate but they also want us to give back to our community. The student support services office gives you assistance if you have a low income or are the first generation in your family to graduate from college. When I started getting down after my first year, they were able to boost me up. But at the same time that they are grooming you, they use you to communicate to others. There's no way I'm going to go anywhere after this experience and be quiet in a situation where I should speak.

▶ Central Piedmont Community College

The largest community college in North Carolina, Central Piedmont Community College provides high quality, flexible, educational programs and services that are academically, geographically, and financially accessible. CPCC is also committed to being the premiere workforce development institution in its region. CPCC places a high priority on helping low-skill, low-wage workers adapt to the demands of a changing economy. Its dynamic continuing education division now serves the economic development and training needs of more than 2,700 employers and a growing number of English language learners. To serve a rapidly growing Hispanic population, CPCC created a multi-level ESL program with curricula customized for and integrated with high demand occupational programs. The Charlotte community recognizes the strategic role CPCC plays in creating and supporting higher-wage employment: in the past decade, CPCC has secured over $200 million in bond financing and opened four new campuses around the county to make the college more accessible to students.

▶ Community College of Vermont

The Community College of Vermont has a 30-year history of innovative approaches to serving a geographically dispersed, largely rural population with extremely limited state resources. Almost half the student body is unprepared academically for credit classes, 43 percent have incomes below $10,000, 50 percent have dependents, 6 percent have documented disabilities, and 80 percent are first-generation college-goers. Tuition-driven and committed to open access, CCV operates statewide with no campus and no permanent faculty members. With a site in each of the state's 12 labor markets, CCV provides its services at locations within 25 miles of nearly every Vermonter. Student-centered programming is the college's mission and mantra. Classes, even on-line offerings, are capped at 20; the average hovers around 12. Despite the multiple barriers students face and the college's financing and infrastructure constraints, CCV has created a culture of high expectations and achieved remarkable outcomes: the transfer rate to four-year colleges hit 50 percent in 2001, well above the national average.

▶ Portland Community College

Portland Community College is a recognized leader in expanding access and advancement opportunities for underserved youth and adults. PCC serves 100,000 students and enrolls more freshmen and sophomores in credit programs than does the entire Oregon State University system. Over 2,000 high school-age students enroll at PCC, making it the largest high school in Portland. PCC's multiple entry points allow students with as low as third-grade-level reading and math skills to enroll in non-credit and developmental education courses that are directly linked to credit-based career education programs. Yet access is only the first step in PCC's commitment to helping low-income students earn postsecondary credentials. PCC programs emphasize quick skill development for students—most of whom are balancing work, family, and education—so they can meet short-term goals that also lead to better jobs or further education. Short-term modules, ESL integrated into occupational programs, and competency-based programs are all part of efforts to serve working adults. Eighty percent of the out-of-school youth who enter PCC's high school completion program continue their education in the program, earn a diploma or G.E.D., return to a high school program, or obtain employment.

▶ San Jacinto College North

A decade ago, San Jacinto College North outside Houston had fallen out of touch with the community's changing demographics. Outreach to the rapidly growing Hispanic population was minimal. Enrollments had declined. The very future of the college teetered in a community where less than 10 percent of the adult population has a college credential. Five years ago the college began a dramatic rebound, however. Today, a commitment to serving Hispanics and other minorities unifies the college leadership and faculty, and drives a reform agenda that is having results. San Jacinto North has restructured and revitalized its developmental education program, winning a statewide award for its efforts. The college has quickened recruitment and streamlined enrollment. Efforts to keep students coming back once enrolled have made headway. Minority enrollment is up more than 30 percent since 1996, and retention for African-Americans and Hispanics has climbed 17 percent. Area employers have helped co-design and launch five new occupational programs in high-growth technician fields.

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For more information about **MetLife Foundation Community College Excellence Awards**, contact:

Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street
Boston, MA 02110
617.728.4446
www.jff.org

For more information about **2001-2002 Winners and Finalists**, contact:

Central Piedmont Community College
P.O. Box 35009
Charlotte, NC 28235-5009
www.cpcc.cc.nc.us

Community College of Vermont
P.O. Box 120
Waterbury, VT 05676-0120
www.ccv.vsc.edu

Portland Community College
12000 SW 49th Avenue
Portland, OR 97280-0990
www.pcc.edu

San Jacinto College North
5800 Uvalde
Houston, TX 77049
www.sjcd.cc.tx.us

Sinclair Community College
444 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45402-1460
www.sinclair.edu

West Hills Community College
300 Cherry Lane
Coalinga, CA 93210
www.westhillscollege.com

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MetLife Foundation, established in 1976 by MetLife, supports health, education, civic, and cultural programs throughout the United States. For more information about the Foundation, please visit www.metlife.org.

Jobs for the Future is a leading innovator in strategies to accelerate education and career advancement for both young people and adults. Jobs for the Future provides research, consulting, and technical assistance on education and workforce development issues to public and private organizations throughout the United States and abroad. www.jff.org

What Kids Can Do, through an array of media and publication formats, brings student work and voices to bear on critical issues facing schools and communities. It also presents powerful examples of what young people, guided by teachers and other adults, can contribute and achieve. www.whatkidscando.org

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On behalf of MetLife Foundation, Jobs for the Future and What Kids Can Do express warmest appreciation to the students and staff of the community colleges represented here, whose candor and commitment brought this publication to life.

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